

President Kent

by ChiefPam

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Summary: All rise for the President of the United States ...

President Kent. A whimsical (and highly improbable) look into Lois & Clark's future.

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Disclaimer: I don't own any of the characters you've seen on TV. :)

><br>pointing finger at Chris Mulder This was all \*her\* fault; she planted the idea in my head (not, to be fair, that she knew she was doing it). So blame her if you don't like it g

><br>Actually, this is what you get when a FOLC reads political magazines that mention Clark Kent (National Review, 1/29/96, page 44). Is this even more of a fantasy than these things usually are? Well, sure... but it's fun! \_\_\_\_\_

><br>PRESIDENT KENT

>by Pam Jernigan [jernigan@bellsouth.net](mailto:jernigan@bellsouth.net) <br>\_\_\_\_\_

><br>By midnight, the election night party at the Metropolis Hilton's main ballroom was working its way through lively and approaching rowdy; the "Kent for President" campaign was expecting a win. The stage and podium were draped with ribbons - red, blue, and yellow - and news crews for all the major networks had staked out corners of the room for their live broadcasts. Until the final vote tallies were in, however, there was nothing to do but drink, laugh, and shout to be heard over everyone else shouting to be heard. All the Kents were gathered upstairs, glued to LNN's election night coverage.

><br>Jimmy was circulating the floor, collecting people's reactions to spice up the front page news story he'd already written for tomorrow, anticipating a win. Perry probably had one already written to cover a defeat, but if so, he'd kept very quiet about it. "It's been a remarkable campaign, Jerry," one of the anchors declared, passing time until California's votes were in, struggling to stand out among the other news personalities (and a few real journalists) all reporting back to their viewers. "-came out of nowhere, last year -" Jimmy followed a waiter, grabbing an hors d'oeuvre, and ended up

near another live broadcast. "-picked up lots of female votes pretty quickly, but that may not have mattered without the enthusiastic support from the Daily Planet's editorial pages-" Jimmy had to smile at that, and moved on quickly, so as not to be noticed. The Planet hadn't committed so strongly to a candidate in 30 years, Perry had said, but that just made it about time they did. "That Kansas charm really won the public's hearts-" reported another famous voice. It seemed he couldn't get away from the TV people. Over and over they repeated the same observations they'd been making all year.

><br>"Ladies and gentlemen!" The microphone squealed as the campaign manager tried to attract attention. The news cameras, as if all on a single control, swiveled towards the stage, but the partiers in the middle of the floor were slower to catch on. "Ladies and gentlemen!" He tried again, laughing. "We have the results from the majority of states; California has now reported in!" That started to grab their attention; the loud shouts of socializing were replaced by the softer murmurs of speculation. "It is my very great honor to introduce to you..." he paused, savoring the moment, and drawing out the tension. "I'm delighted, in fact, to present to you - President-Elect Kent!"

><br>The crowd in front of the podium went wild, with the younger and more enthusiastic members jumping up and down, and hugging whoever happened to be nearby, making even more noise than before. There was a stirring at the back of the stage, as the Secret Service agents prepared for the entrance of the new First Family. Jonathan came into view first, waving at the crowd and the cameras, looking much more comfortable than he felt in a new dark blue suit. Martha emerged next, with her hair very sleek and stylish, wearing a sharply-tailored blue and red dress, and seeming perfectly at ease, smiling broadly and shaking hands with everyone who was reaching out to her, smiling at the news crews, but ignoring the hopeful microphones. Lastly, Clark and Lois Kent emerged from the back room, smiling and laughing, walking arm in arm, whispering to one another as they pointed out things of interest around the large ballroom. Clark even managed to locate Jimmy and wave to him.

><br>President-Elect Martha Kent stepped up to the microphone, and stood beaming at the crowds for a moment, giving them a chance to complete their cheering before she spoke. Jonathan took up his regular place a few steps behind and a little to the right of his wife, looking proud enough to burst. She'd made history, as the first woman president, and she'd certainly earned it - she'd done a marvelous job through all the speeches and debates. Why, he would never have known how to argue for the things they both believed in the way she had - who would have thought that one course in political science (well, and maybe that semester of public speaking) would have led to this?

><br>Lois and Clark slipped off the stage to join their friends in the press pit; Clark especially didn't need to be in the spotlight any more than necessary - and this modesty hadn't earned them any enemies. Lois had been writing human interest pieces along the whole campaign - it wasn't exactly her favorite type of article, but she couldn't very well live in the middle of a story and not report it. It had been an exhausting year.

><br>Martha looked around the room in pride and euphoria. All the hard work of campaigning had paid off - and this was just the beginning of her challenges. She had definite ideas of where she wanted the country to go - but tonight called for a gracious-in-victory speech, not a hammer-the-issues speech. She held

out her hands for quiet, and after a moment was awarded with an abatement of noise. "Friends, my fellow Americans..." she paused for effect, smiling wickedly, "and members of the press..."

><br>A laugh broke out at that, as she'd intended. Her relationship to the husband & wife reporting team of Lane & Kent had been publicized quite a lot in the past six months, as her opponent had tried to manufacture some sort of scandal, with no luck. The relationship had, overall, been a plus for her; she felt comfortable with the reporters along the campaign trail, and they treated her almost like one of their own.

><br>Martha continued her acceptance speech, but Lois let her attention wander (it wasn't like she hadn't heard it rehearsed a few times already upstairs). She preferred to observe the crowd, and float on the natural high of winning. And speaking of floating... she angled her head downward a little to just make sure Clark's shoes stayed on or near the floor. He caught her inspection and laughed, putting his arm around her shoulders. "Don't worry, hon," he shouted in her ear, barely loud enough to be understood. "I'm too tired!"

><br>She looked up and laughed back, caught up in the joy of the moment. She stood on tiptoes to get her mouth close to his ear and enunciated clearly, "Not too tired, I hope - you still have an appearance to make!"

><br>"Oh yeah, so I have. I'd better get going, if I'm going to time it right. See you later." He wiggled his eyebrows at her in comic regret, and kissed her quickly before blending into the crowd. Lois returned her attention to her fellow reporters, and soon found several bent on interviewing her. She patiently assented to a short TV spot, and waited as the anchor set up the shot.

><br>"Next, we have Ms. Lois Lane Kent, half of the Lane and Kent reporting team, and daughter-in-law to our new president. How do you feel about the election results, Ms. Lane?"

><br>Lois pasted on her best professional smile and spoke directly into the microphone, keeping her eyes on the camera, and ignoring the patent stupidity of the question. "Oh, I'm just thrilled, of course. Mrs. Kent will be a great president."

><br>The reporter continued on with the by-now familiar routine. "There have been persistent rumors, Ms. Lane, that you and your mother-in-law don't get along. Do you have anything to say to that?"

><br>Lois shrugged and smiled. "There will always be rumors, but these aren't true at all. We have always gotten along really well, both before and after Clark and I were married."

><br>"Do you anticipate a post in the new government?"

><br>A new question, for a change. "Well, no," Lois answered, slightly startled. "I already have a job."

><br>"But as a Presidential relative, surely you'll be given Secret Service protection, and won't that make it difficult to function as an investigative reporter?" The anchor looked faintly sympathetic over that dilemma.

><br>"Well, we'll just have to take that as it comes and see what happens," she shrugged, keeping a bright smile on her face, although she *was* concerned. Not only would Secret Service agents complicate her job, but they'd also be all too likely to discover Clark's secret. They'd decided that their best hope was to have Superman designated as their official protector, with Presidential (maternal) support and authorization. "Oh, look, there's Superman." She pointed behind the cameraman's head, toward the stage, and was mercifully forgotten.

><br>Superman had flown in from who knew where (third floor cleaning

supply closet) and was now descending vertically to the stage, near the podium, where President Kent had just finished her speech. She smiled at his approach, and motioned him toward the microphone. He landed, and shared the podium with her, leaning to his side a little to reach the mike.

><br>"Good evening. You know I haven't endorsed a candidate in this election, just as I never endorse candidates in \*any\* election. But now that the people have spoken, I have to say that I'm glad you've made this choice. Madam President, if you need me, you have only to call." He held out his hand gravely, and she shook it with equal dignity - except for the twinkle in her eye - before they both turned back to the microphone.

><br>"Thank you, Superman - although I hope not to need you."

><br>He smiled, relaxing a little from the formal pose. "We share that hope. And I wanted to congratulate the mother of my friend, Clark." He stepped back a little, turning to face his mother, who was smiling and wiping her eyes. "Mrs. Kent, I couldn't be prouder of you than if you were \*my\* mother." He leaned forward to hug her then, and she returned the embrace, kissing him on the cheek. After a moment, he pulled back, and turned to face the crowd again, keeping one arm around her shoulders. She turned outwards as well, and they posed and waved for the throng of cameras for a few moments.

><br>Lois watched her husband and his mother with tear-filled eyes, determined to obtain a good copy of that pose. It would look great in their living room. She felt a hand on her shoulder, and turned to see Jonathan, down from the platform and mingling. He was swallowing hard, and she hugged him. "Aren't they great?" She shouted in his ear. He didn't attempt to shout back, but he nodded, and she knew he was overcome by the same sense of pride she was feeling.

><br>A few moments later, Jimmy stumbled across her. "Lois! Hey, congratulations!" He hugged her without warning, but let go before she could do more than let out a surprised exclamation.

><br>"Uh, thanks, Jimmy! Having fun?"

><br>"Oh yeah, great party! And I'm getting lots of material to punch up my article - in fact, I think I see Perry looking for me, we're going to have to go insert that story pretty soon to get the paper out this morning."

><br>Lois glanced at her watch. "You'd better get going, then, it's nearly 1am!"

><br>Jimmy grinned. "We'll make it, don't you worry. So, hey, where's Clark?"

><br>"He's around, somewhere..." she gestured vaguely around the still-crowded ballroom, noting that Superman did seem to have left the stage already.

><br>"Right here, in fact," Clark chimed in, coming up behind her and snaking an arm around her waist. "Hi, Jimmy."

><br>"Hi, Clark - how's your mother, the President?" Jimmy grinned impudently.

><br>"She's fine, but you know the rules - anything I say about Mom is off the record."

><br>Jimmy looked thoughtful. "Is that off the record as in an unnamed source told me, or -"

><br>Clark interrupted, suppressing a smile. "Off the record as in I know where you live, and I'm bigger than you are."

><br>"Okay, okay!" Jimmy put up his hands in surrender, laughing at the threat. "Oops, I see Perry waving at me, I'd better be gone... see you two!"

><br>They waved him away, and Lois felt as if all her energy left with him, as she started to crash down from her earlier high - they

\*had\* been doing last-minute campaigning all day. She leaned into Clark's chest, and he raised the arm that had been around her waist to encircle her upper arm. "Well, she did it."  
><br>"Yep. The next 8 years are going to be interesting... and we don't even have to pretend we don't have a relationship with her..."

><br>Clark chuckled softly as he led his sleepy wife out of the ballroom.

><br>The End

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## 2. All the President's Men

Disclaimer: I don't own any of the characters you've seen on TV :)

><br>[Note: This is a sequel to PRESIDENT KENT. If you haven't read the original, you should read that before this. My ideas about the Secret Service come mainly from Tom Clancy novels and that one Clint Eastwood movie, so please forgive any inaccuracies. I think I saw somewhere that Secret Service doesn't just protect the President and his family, they also investigate counterfeiting and some other cop stuff; they do in my universe anyway. g]

><br>Thanks to Sarah Wood & Chris Mulder, as always, for putting up with my early drafts. Thanks to Debbie Manning for helping me polish it up.

><br>ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN

>(can't keep Lois Lane out of trouble) <br>by Pam Jernigan  
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>"I hate it when I get kidnapped," Lois announced to her cell-mates. This was actually not true; after spending a sedate year on the campaign trail, she was enjoying the excitement. Clark was right there with her, after all, even if he did have to be careful. Their Secret Service agent, Keith Jackson, had been grabbed along with them, and his presence slowed things down somewhat.<br>

>"You do not," Clark contradicted her amiably. He wasn't particularly thrilled to be in this situation, but the mild tonic of danger was making Lois sparkle, and he did so love it when she sparkled.<br>

>She grinned, earning and ignoring a quizzical look from Keith. "Well, it doesn't matter; Superman will get us out pretty soon." Just as soon as one of them figured out how to do it without rousing Keith's suspicions, that is...<br>

>Keith had had the worst of the short fight when they'd been kidnapped. He could feel a bruise starting to spread on his cheek, but with his dark coloring, he suspected the others hadn't noticed it yet. He fully expected to lose his job over this fiasco, but the most important thing was to get the civilians out of here, and he intended to do his best. "We need to try to escape on our own, and not count on Superman. I mean, where was he an hour ago, when we were grabbed?"<br>

>Nettled, Clark stood. "Well, I guess he thought he could relax, since the Secret Service was on the case."<br>

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>In the White House, Maxwell Morton stood outside the Oval Office composing himself. He was the new head of the Secret Service, and he hated to begin his service to the new president with bad news... but it wouldn't get any better while he waited in a hallway. He knocked

on the office door and entered wearing his best expression of competence. "Madam President, Mr. Kent" He nodded respectfully to the new Commander in Chief and her husband.<br>

>Martha Kent looked up from the paperwork to greet him. She'd thought, during the campaign, that she'd known all there was to know... but since officially taking on the office of President, she'd been amazed by how much information a dedicated government organization could amass, and she felt she had to read it all. Thank goodness for Jonathan, and his placid good sense. He'd calmed her down, reassured her, and insisted that she take breaks, so that she didn't burn out in her first week in office.<br>

>"Yes, Mr. Morton, what is it?"<br>

>"Madam President... I'm afraid that Boy Scout and Firefly have been abducted." Maxwell braced himself for a dreaded bout of feminine hysteria.<br>

>She blinked in confusion. "Who?"<br>

>Maxwell colored slightly. "Sorry, ma'am. Those are the Secret Service code names for your son and daughter-in-law."<br>

>Martha closed her eyes, leaned back in the chair, and sighed loudly. "Oh for pete's sake, already?" She rubbed the bridge of her nose with one hand, trying to stave off a headache. She'd only been in office for two days; wasn't there supposed to be a honeymoon period?<br>

>Jonathan looked up sharply. "How and when did this happen, Mr. Morton?"<br>

>Maxwell stared at the President, slightly nonplussed by her reaction, but the First Gentleman's question snapped him out of it. "It was several hours ago, Mr. Kent. They had been visiting the Daily Planet's newsroom. A van drove up, and two men on the sidewalk pushed them all into it. It was a very well coordinated operation. Keith Jackson, one of my newer men, was with them as security; he was taken too. My back-up man saw it all, but wasn't close enough to effect a rescue."<br>

>Jonathan looked over at his wife, and their eyes met in silent understanding. Clark hadn't been able to do anything because of their "protectors". They'd known that Secret Service would be a complicating factor, but they hadn't yet found time to address that problem. Obviously they'd left it a little late.<br>

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>"Mr. Kent, are you good in a fight? Mrs. Kent, you can probably hide behind the cots, to stay out of the way." Keith was doing his best to coordinate them, but they weren't paying too much attention to him. Clark, who'd explained that his bonds had "mysteriously" not held, had already untied the other two.<br>

>Clark laughed at that. "You really don't know us well, do you? Lois is better in a hand-to-hand fight than I am." He leaned forward conspiratorially. "She fights dirty."<br>

>Lois rolled her eyes. "Thanks, Clark, for that image boost."<br>

>"Well, if you're sure..." Keith looked doubtfully at the seemingly delicate "Firefly". He frankly didn't understand their lack of concern over the situation. Mrs. Kent seemed to be having a wonderful time, and her husband acted as if he were humoring her. They were clearly both waiting for Superman to show up. Though he would never admit it out loud, Keith shared their hope. Superman had been his idol ever since college, and the chance to meet him was one of the reasons he'd tried to get this assignment. Still, his sense of duty wouldn't permit him to sit around and wait.<br>

>"Look, when they open the door, Keith will tackle the first guy, I'll get the second, and Clark will take the third guy, if there is

one." In typical fashion, Lois took over the little group. "Keith, why don't you see if you can work on getting the door open?"<br>

>Glad for a plan, any plan, to follow, Keith tackled the metal door. He noted peripherally that the other two withdrew to the other end of the room for a low-voiced conference, but he studiously ignored them. Secret Service agents were trained not to spy on their charges.<br>

>At the back of the room, Lois whispered her plan to Clark. "When they open the door, you think you can speed out of here, tie up everybody out there, and be back in here by the time we finish our little fight? That way we can tell Keith that Superman did drop by to help, without letting him know that you're it."<br>

>"No," he disagreed equally softly. "That would make the timing too coincidental. Keith would notice; he's not stupid. That's the trouble with these Secret Service people. How about you distract him," Clark suggested. "I'll break out through the wall, tie them all up, and jump back in here. That way it'll look like Superman just breezed on through and let us out."<br>

>Lois considered that plan for a moment. "If you break out, won't the debris be outside the cell? It'd be hard to make it look like you broke \*in\*."<br>

>Clark pulled down his glasses to survey the building outside their cell. "I've got it. I'll go out the west wall, tie them up, and come back in through the east wall... that gives one entry, one exit. Who'd be able to tell which came first?"<br>

>Lois nodded, impressed. "One distraction, coming up..."<br>

>"Stay low," he cautioned her.<br>

>She nodded understanding and approached Keith. "Any luck with the door?" she asked at normal volume.<br>

>"No, it's pretty solid. If I had my other shoes, I could try picking the lock..." He glanced up at her speculatively. "I don't suppose you have a hairpin?"<br>

>Lois rolled her eyes in exasperation. "No, I don't have a hairpin. Why do men always assume women have hairpins? I mean, look at me, does this hairstyle \*need\* hairpins?" Keith held out placating hands, careful not to touch her, but she ignored him. She squatted down next to him, casting an expert eye over the lock in question. "Besides, you'd need something longer for that one. I've got some long wands in my purse, but they took that."<br>

>"You carry lockpicks in your purse?" Keith's image of "Firefly" was obviously undergoing some rapid and drastic changes.<br>

>"You'd be surprised at what I carry in my purse," she predicted smugly.<br>

>Keith's reply was lost in what seemed like an explosion. When their heads cleared and the dust settled, they looked around to find that one of the cots had been set on its side, protecting them from the debris strewn about by the creation of holes in two walls of their cell.<br>

>Lois looked around to see Clark sitting behind them, looking convincingly surprised. She suppressed a smile and crawled over to him, checking his hair for cement dust.<br>

>"Lois, are you okay?" Clark asked in a low voice. Setting up the cot to shield them from potential flying debris had been risky; if Superman had really been breaking in from the outside, he'd have had a hard time arranging that. But he couldn't leave Lois unprotected.<br>

>"I'm fine, honey. I think Superman did a great job." She smiled a brilliant smile, just for him, exhilarated to be back in action after so long.<br>

>"That was Superman?" Keith asked, apparently a little dazed by the speed of events.<br>

>Lois turned to look at him over her shoulder. "Didn't I tell you we could count on him?"<br>

>"Yeah, you did." He looked oddly wistful for a moment. "I just wish I could have met him." "Oh, I think you will, Keith," Clark predicted wearily. "One way or another."<br>

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>"Mr. Morton, we need to talk, to set up some other security arrangements." Jonathan stood, feeling that it would be best to strike while the iron was hot. "As soon as Clark and Lois get back, I'll want to have a meeting with you and your man - you said his name was Keith?"<br>

>Maxwell frowned, puzzled. This couple was not what he expected. He wasn't consciously chauvinistic, but he did harbor certain vague notions that women should do "women stuff," and men should do "men stuff," and Martha and Jonathan Kent broke those stereotypes left and right. Quite frankly, he'd expected that any man whose wife was the one running for office would be, well, henpecked, to put it politely. Instead, they seemed to act as a team in their unusual roles. He looked to the President, to see what her reaction would be to this suggestion. She had gone back to reading papers, so she didn't notice his gaze, but Jonathan did.<br>

>He chuckled. "Martha, Mr. Morton wants your approval."<br>

>She looked up. "Oh yes, Mr. Morton, you need to have that meeting. In fact, I've looked into what positions it's legal for Presidential relatives to hold, and I want you to know I'm putting my husband in charge of all our security arrangements - he'll be your liaison to me."<br>

>"That will be fine, Madam President." Maxwell tried to hide his relief. A clear chain of command made him feel much better. They'd need to change Mr. Kent's Secret Service code name, though. "Farmer" just wasn't respectful enough for their Presidential contact.<br>

>Martha looked at the clock on the desk. "Let's say five PM, shall we? Clark and Lois should be back by then; they ought to be in on the meeting."<br>

>Jonathan nodded agreement. "That time works for me. Mr. Morton, do you have any conflicts then?"<br>

>"You expect them back that quickly?" Maxwell squinted at him in confusion. "I'm gratified that you have such confidence in my men, but I really can't guarantee anything..."<br>

>Jonathan held out a hand to stop the confused flow of words. "No," he corrected gently. "We have faith in Superman."<br>

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>Lois, Clark, and Keith were back at the White House long before the meeting time. They went their separate ways to wash up and give their statements to the other Secret Service agents, but met up again to make their way to the meeting. When they arrived, they found Jonathan and Mr. Morton there already, leafing through some files.<br>

>"Hello, son, hi Lois."<br>

>"Hi Dad... have you met Keith Jackson? He's our assigned agent."<br>

>Jonathan looked the agent up and down, noting the flash of white bandage on the agent's dark cheek. "Pleased to meet you, Keith." He held out his hand, and Keith took it for a brief, but firm handclasp.<br>

>Keith swallowed hard. "Mr. Kent, after my poor showing today, I'm prepared to offer my resignation."<br>



>"Nonsense." Jonathan waved the suggestion away. "I've been looking through your file, here, and it's very impressive. You always did a fine job on the investigation side, you're just new to the protection detail. Live and learn." He gestured towards the table. "If everyone would like to be seated?"<br>

>Relieved, Keith sat, and resolved to be very inconspicuous for awhile.<br>

>"We're all here now, then? Fine." Jonathan looked around. He sat at the head of the oval table, with Clark and then Lois to his right, discreetly holding hands. The Secret Service men sat opposite them. The arrangement was more confrontational than he'd have liked, but he supposed it was inevitable.<br>

>"Mr. Morton," the First Gentleman began, "We need to re-think security arrangements for my son and his wife. They have always gotten into trouble, and I don't think the entire Secret Service could keep them out of it." His gaze landed on Lois, who ducked her head to hide a smile. "Also, they intend to return to their old jobs as reporters, at least as much as their new notoriety will permit." Now Jonathan stared at his son, in an unspoken and unnecessary message of caution.<br>

>Keith stirred uneasily, but didn't interrupt. Mr. Morton fussed with some files in his briefcase.<br>

>"Ever since these two have worked together... how long has it been, Clark?"<br>

>"Since I met Lois? Seems like only yesterday." He smiled at her. "But it's funny, because I can't remember what my life was like before her."<br>

>Lois, who'd been ready to give the exact total in years and months, melted at that reply, and could only smile back at her husband.<br>

>Jonathan chuckled at the two of them. It was always interesting to see the effects of danger on people. Keith was still shaken - not enough to affect his performance noticeably, but it was there. Clark and Lois, on the other hand, just turned more strongly towards each other.<br>

>"As I was saying, ever since these two teamed up, they've had Superman watching over them. He's gotten them safely to this point, including the rescue today. I plan to give him sole responsibility for their safety, officially." That drew Clark's attention.<br>

>"No Secret Service to protect them?" Mr. Morton was shocked. "I cannot endorse this!"<br>

>"Well, actually," Jonathan drawled, looking at some papers, "you don't have to. As the liaison to the President, I have that authority. Withdraw all Secret Service agents from Clark and Lois Kent."<br>

>Lois looked very cheered by this development. "That'll be great, Jonathan! I was wondering if any of my sources would want to talk where they could be overheard by Secret Service agents, and they'd really complicate undercover work..."<br>

>Mr. Morton looked vaguely panicked. "I simply can't do that." At Jonathan's stern look, he quailed, and back-pedaled quickly. "Not until I have confirmation that Superman is really on the job."<br>

>Clark sighed. "All right, I'll go try and find him. But you can't have anyone follow me - Superman's entitled to some secrets."<br>

>Morton nodded reluctantly, and indicated that Keith should communicate that to the agents in the hall. Keith and Clark left together, while Jonathan and Mr. Morton fell into a softly-spoken

argument. Keith reentered a minute later. His air of shellshock had been replaced by one of suppressed excitement. Lois smiled sympathetically as she recognized his case of "Superman fever".<br>

>He saw her smile, and whispered across the table to her, "So, what's he like? You're friends, right? Do you... hang out together?"<br>

>Lois grinned at the mental picture of Superman chilling out in a sports bar with Clark. "Not really. He's... not the kind of guy you hang out with, if you know what I mean." Although sometimes he did forget to change, and she'd come into the room to see Superman floating in mid-air, enraptured by a football game... Her grin widened involuntarily. "He's usually very dedicated to his work."  
<br>

>"Oh." Keith sat back to digest that, not sure how to take it.<br>

>They settled back to wait. Clark would need to get off the White House grounds before he'd feel safe to change; that should take only a few minutes. Lois pictured Clark hovering somewhere above the White House, unsure of how to make an entrance that wouldn't be too coincidental. After she felt enough time had elapsed, she smiled slightly. "This is taking too long," she announced, eliciting a surprised frown from Jonathan. She stood, walked over to the window, took a deep breath, and yelled "Superman!"<br>

>Almost before she'd finished his name he was there, hovering outside the window, looking concerned. She smiled to reassure him, and his worried look melted away as comprehension dawned. Safely facing away from the men in the room, she winked at him. He kept his serious expression intact, although the corners of his mouth twitched, and gestured towards the window. She inspected it - it was thicker than normal glass, probably bulletproof, and didn't seem to open. He shrugged and disappeared.<br>

>Seconds later, there was a tap on the door, causing all heads to swivel in that direction. The door opened, and Superman entered, looking at Lois.<br>

>"You screamed?" he inquired politely.<br>

>She grinned. "Yes, we needed you for a meeting. Clark's gone looking for you, but I thought this might be faster."<br>

>Superman walked over to the table to shake hands with Jonathan and Mr. Morton. Then he reduced Keith to a stunned silence by the simple expedient of greeting him by name.<br>

>He turned back to his father. "Well, Mr. Kent, what can I do for you?"<br>

>"As today's events proved, my son and daughter-in-law need alternate security arrangements. I'm putting you in charge of their security; I know I can trust you with it."<br>

>Superman smiled. "I'll look after them just as if they were my family."<br>

>Jonathan chuckled. "I know you will, s-Superman. Mr. Morton, is that good enough for you?"<br>

>Mr. Morton had resigned himself to the plan by this time, and was busy mentally re-allocating his men. "Yes, as long as I see a Presidential Order authorizing this unusual arrangement."<br>

>"It'll be on your desk tomorrow, Mr. Morton," Jonathan promised. "Superman, thank you for your cooperation - now maybe you'd better get started by finding my son before he gets into more trouble out there."<br>

>Superman looked briefly exasperated at the teasing before he gained control of his expression. "Yes, sir." Nodding to Mr. Morton and

Keith, he turned and walked out.<br>  
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>Lois left the men in conference room discussing other security issues. She found Clark coming up the hall, and they kissed hello. "Hey there, handsome."<br>  
>He smiled, but looked distracted. "What is it?" she whispered.<br>  
  
>"Secret Service guys talking in the conference room... I don't usually eavesdrop, but they mentioned your name..." Suddenly he smiled. "They're talking about your code name. They had been calling you Firefly, but Keith thinks they should change it - to Spitfire." He lost interest in their conversation and returned his focus to his wife.<br>  
>She smiled. "I could handle "Spitfire". You know what they call you, don't you? Your father told me..."<br>  
>Clark shook his head, putting his arm around her shoulders and starting them down the hallway.<br>  
>"Boy Scout." She giggled.<br>  
>He grinned wryly. "Well, I don't mind. They can call me anything they like, as long as they \*don't\* call me Superman."<br>  
>The End<br>  
> <br>

### 3. Presidential Party

Disclaimer: I don't own any of the characters you've seen on TV. :)

><br>[Note: This story is part of the continuity begun in PRESIDENT KENT and continued in ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN; you should read those first. (No, really, you should, this won't make much sense otherwise - you go and find them; I'll wait right here...)]  
><br>In this story, the asterisks (\*\*\*) don't denote a change of scene so much as a change in point of view.]  
><br>As always, big thanks to my once-and-future partner Sarah Wood, and to Chris Mulder, the A-plot queen! Thanks also to everyone who wrote to me about the first two stories (especially Michael) and encouraged me to write more - you know who you are - consider this one your fault g  
><br>\_\_\_\_\_  
><br>PRESIDENTIAL PARTY  
>(but no one wants to dance) <br>by Pam Jernigan  
jernigan@bellsouth.net  
>\_\_\_\_\_  
><br>---- Prologue: February 7th (two weeks after the inauguration)  
----  
><br>Maybe coming back to work hadn't been such a good idea. During the campaign, Clark had often daydreamed about getting away from politics and back to the Planet; Lois had especially looked forward to reporting the news instead of making it. They should have known it wouldn't be that simple. Nothing they did was ever that simple.  
  
><br>Take this press conference, for example. It was a simple announcement by the town council of a new property annexation, and it should have been a fairly easy assignment, which was the reason Perry had given it to them. They'd spent the last year on the campaign trail, so they needed time to get caught up on Metropolis issues. At least they'd finally graduated out of the re-writes he'd given them their first week back.  
><br>But this simple press conference and easy assignment had nearly

gotten out of hand. As soon as they'd appeared, most of the other reporters had dropped the city council cold and focused on them, instead, with all the subtlety of a pack of ravenous wolves. At least thirty people pressed in on them from all sides, clamoring for attention, making individual questions hard to hear, much less comprehend.

><br>"Clark, what does your mother have to say about these recent terrorist bombings?" "Lois, do you know anything about her new policy in the Balkans?" "What's President Kent's position on this land grab by the city of Metropolis?" The frivolity of that last question did earn its originator a few scornful looks, but on the whole, the crowd was deadly serious.

><br>Clark had held out his hands in a vain effort to forestall some of the chaos; he could see that Lois was near her flash point. To her credit, however, she hadn't exploded. Instead, she'd glared. One by one, she'd stared down her once and future colleagues until the flow of questions slowed to a weak trickle. Only then had she spoken.

><br>"We are not, repeat \*not,\* here on behalf of the President. We are here as reporters - you do recognize the word, right? - for the Daily Planet. The same reporters we were for years, the same people you've known for years. We cover the city beat, same as you." She looked around to see if they were getting it. "Only better, of course," she taunted, with a smug lift of her chin.

><br>Clark winced at this jab. He surveyed the crowd surrounding them. The scoop-hungry look was fading from their eyes, though, and he started to comprehend her strategy; she was getting them to focus on her, not her famous mother-in-law.

><br>"Says you, Lane," came a challenge from somewhere behind them.

><br>Lois turned in the general direction of the voice. "Yeah, says me, Jake - unless you've improved miraculously in the year I've been gone." Her tone dripped sarcasm. "Your free ride on this beat is over, boys and girls, so you'd better get to work."

><br>She moved towards the podium then, grabbing two of the good seats, forcing the focus back to the press conference. Clark could still hear murmured speculation from all around them, though, and it was hard to ignore all the looks they were getting. Lois kept her attention studiously on the details of the annexation, but her cheeks were red.

><br>\*\*\*

><br>From the side of the room, Keith Jackson watched. He'd come in near the end of the mob scene. Even though he was no longer on Clark and Lois Kent's Secret Service guard detail, and was off-duty to boot, he'd been on the verge of interceding. Lois, however, had proved herself more than equal to the situation. He'd been right, he reflected; Spitfire was a good code name for her.

><br>Keith was a slender, serious, black man, wearing the suit-and-tie uniform of the Secret Service, in Metropolis for the day to do some advance preparations for the President's next visit. He was in superb shape; sports were no longer the main focus of his life, but he still worked out daily. At almost thirty, he was old enough to have a clear idea of his goals in life, but young enough to just be starting to achieve them. He was naturally impatient, but experience had proved to him that patience had its rewards.

><br>So he'd settled back to wait until the end of the press conference. With any luck and a little nerve, he'd be able to grab a short conversation with the Kents about Superman.

><br>Keith had been a Superman fan for years; ever since college, when Superman had first appeared. He'd followed the news stories and

collected some of the merchandise. After a while, he'd found out about the Internet fan groups, and had joined in with enthusiasm. As long as you took a few basic precautions, you could meet some really great people via modem. And what had started as adolescent hero worship had grown over the years into a more mature and whole-hearted admiration.

><br>Growing up, he'd never even thought about going into law enforcement. The idea of fighting for truth and justice, however, had rung a powerful chord in Keith's young heart and mind, and he'd tried to do his part. He couldn't admit it to himself without feeling foolish and presumptuous, but deep down inside, he felt that as a Federal agent, he was on Superman's team, fighting for the same goals. Like his hero, Keith wanted to help.

><br>His dream was to get to know Superman, just a little, to let him know how he'd changed his life. Maybe even be able to help him once in a while. He didn't dare to dream higher. That was why he'd applied for his current Secret Service position in the first place. His supervisor in the Investigations Branch had hated to lose him, but for the chance to meet his hero, Keith had pulled all the strings available.

><br>It had worked, too. In a meeting a few weeks ago, Superman had shaken his hand, and by some magic, had even known his name. That brief moment had elated him for a day. Unfortunately, he'd soon remembered the reason for that meeting: to relieve Keith of his duty and replace him with Superman. Well, of course Superman could do a better job guarding Clark and Lois Kent, no question, and no one had seemed to hold it against him... but the fact remained that he had failed. Failure was not something to which he was accustomed, and to have it taint his first meeting with his hero...! He was determined to redeem himself. He just had to figure out how.

><br>Which was what he wanted to talk to the Kents about, if he had time. He wasn't even sure exactly what he wanted to ask, but since he was in Metropolis anyway... He just hoped his nerve held. Keith wouldn't have hesitated to give his life for his country, but the thought of asking Superman's friends to help him fulfill his dream was enough to make his palms sweat.

><br>\*\*\*

><br>Forty long minutes into the press conference, Clark heard a distant call for help, listening long enough to figure out what was needed and where. He turned to let his wife know he'd be back in a few minutes, only to find her already packing up her things.

><br>At his inquiring look she smirked. "I've learned a few things over the years, Kent. And I want to get out of here, too, so let's leave together."

><br>"It shouldn't take me long," he whispered as they left the room full of curious eyes. "I'll meet you back at the newsroom."

><br>"That'll be fine. At least we're back to normal in some ways." She smiled up at him as they exited City Hall.

><br>He took time to kiss her goodbye, and ducked into a side street.

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><br>Keith had studied the Kents for the first half hour of the press conference, taking note of how they sat and shifted in their seats, of how they sometimes leaned toward one another to exchange confidences, of how their hands drifted together if they weren't taking notes. Even when they weren't looking at each other there seemed to be a certain awareness between them.

><br>The speaker droned on hypnotically about topological maps,

neighborhood covenants, and legal contracts, and to keep his mind alert, Keith turned his attention to the rest of the large, echoing room. Most of the reporters seemed to be paying close attention to the issue and nodding. He hadn't realized this would take so long; he'd have to be getting back to his job soon.

><br>In surveying the perimeter of the old room, he almost missed seeing the Kents leave. He followed them as quickly as he could, weaving his way through the knots of people standing in the lobby. When he exited the building, however, he saw only Lois, walking towards the parking garage. He looked around, wondering where Clark could have gone, and in that moment of hesitation, lost his nerve. He'd have to catch up with them some other time.

><br>---- Chapter 1: Private party, February 28 (Clark's birthday)  
----

><br>Lois entered the Kents' Kansas farmhouse, absurdly pleased to be there. Since her first visit, years ago, this old farmhouse had slowly changed from a minefield of embarrassment to a familiar and safe haven against the outside world. Within these walls, the Kent family could relax into themselves, without the constant worry of letting "the secret" slip. It was a warm and welcoming feeling, in a sanctuary to be treasured.

><br>At the moment, however, the house looked a bit forlorn. The presidential campaign had absorbed most of the family's energy over the past year, and time had been even more scarce since Martha's inauguration five weeks ago. Lois began turning on lights and plumping the sofa cushions. She had been planning this getaway to celebrate Clark's birthday for weeks now, and if all had gone to plan she'd have been able to spend the day here cleaning, tidying, and maybe, if she felt confident enough, even baking a cake. Crises, however, happen, and she hadn't been able to do any sort of preparation; at this point, the Kent family would be lucky to sneak a few hours together.

><br>Lois heard the double-whoosh of a landing and take-off on the porch, and turned smiling towards the door to greet her father-in-law, the First Gentleman of the United States. He opened the door a bit shakily.

><br>"Hi, Jonathan, how are you?" Lois crossed the floor swiftly to give him a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

><br>"I'm fine, dear, how are you?"

><br>"I'm fine." She stepped back to inspect him from close range. "You're looking a bit wobbly, though. I guess you're not too used to flying Air Clark, are you?"

><br>"No, I'm not," he admitted with a laugh, heading for his easy chair. "I was fine higher up, but when he got in close to land, it unsettled me just a little bit."

><br>Lois smiled. "I usually try to close my eyes for flying close to the ground - all that stuff in your peripheral vision can throw you off. Let me get you some water. Right now, though, you might want to close your eyes and just breathe deeply. It should pass in a minute."

><br>She started for the kitchen without checking to see if he followed her advice, her thoughts turning to Clark. He was probably back at the White House by now, trying to smuggle his mother out for an evening...

><br>\*\*\*

><br>Clark approached the White House from the rear, wondering if he could pull this off again. After Superman had been put in charge of security for Clark and Lois, his mother had been able to insist on a private entrance to her White House living quarters for him, and a suitable compromise between convenience and security had been

established. Now, one of the windows to the private Presidential sitting room was equipped with a motion sensor and a keypad. Once motion outside the second floor window was detected, only the correct passcode would avert an alarm - and that passcode needed to be entered in under three seconds. That time limit, it was felt, would prevent anyone cracking the code, even with electronic devices, but it would be no problem for Superman.

><br>That is, assuming he remembered the passcode. He'd nearly forgotten it earlier, when he'd arrived to get his Dad. He'd had a nightmare-like flash of the alarm sounding, bringing tall men in sunglasses and dark suits scrambling from all directions. After a moment of panicky blankness, however, he'd remembered the code just in time.

><br>He hovered for a moment, out of range of the motion detectors, running through the keying sequence one more time. Getting his dad out, and now coming back for his mother, made him feel like a teenager sneaking home hours after curfew. Not that he'd ever actually broken curfew; Clark hadn't really started breaking rules until he met Lois.

><br>Mentally prepared, he moved forward and keyed in the correct code - with time to spare. Grinning, he opened the now-unlocked window, stepping into his parents' sitting room.

><br>A television set in the corner was tuned to CNN; not-so-incidentally masking any other sounds in the room. Martha looked up from the sofa, smiling at him over the lapful of papers. "Hello, Clark. I'm almost done here, just give me another moment to finish my train of thought."

><br>"Yes ma'am," he replied in mock-formal tones, tipping her a sketchy salute. She laughed softly, her attention drawn back to her papers.

><br>Clark settled into a chair to wait and idly made a visual sweep of the building, verifying that everything was quiet. If a crisis emerged in the next few hours, someone should find the note by the phone indicating where the President could be reached. If not, no one need ever know she'd left the building. He had been a little surprised that his mom had agreed to sneak away like this (it had been Lois's plan, of course) but apparently she was stressed enough to need the time away from the job.

><br>Everything appeared to be shutting down for the night, with just the usual security men on patrol and the two Secret Service agents on guard outside the President's door. Clark recognized Keith Jackson, who'd originally been assigned to protect the younger Kents; his tenure had been brief but eventful, including a short period in which they'd all three been locked up by terrorists. Since being supplanted by Superman, he'd apparently been moved to Presidential security. Clark made a mental note to ask his Dad how Keith was working out; he'd seemed like a good guy.

><br>"So, Jackson, going on the IRC after work tonight?"

><br>Clark was startled when the strange agent in the hall spoke; lost in thought, he'd almost forgotten that he was tuned into them. The question seemed to have a mocking tone to it, and Clark wondered why.

><br>"Probably." Keith answered succinctly. Clark could detect the agent's cheeks heating up, even though Keith's mahogany complexion hid the blush.

><br>"Well, why don't you try a real channel this time, something about sports or something?" Definitely an unfriendly suggestion. The second agent in the hall snorted his disgust. "Only a bunch of kids would hang out on #SUPERMAN."

><br>Clark had been wavering between curiosity and propriety, but at

this turn, curiosity won. There was an IRC channel about him? He'd heard about the newsgroup, but he'd always assumed that it was dominated by, well, twelve-year olds.

><br>Keith was shaking his head doggedly. "No, man, it's not like that. Big Blue is a hero; he means a lot to people. I mean, we talk about the stuff he does, but we also talk about the stuff \*we\* can do, each of us, to help."

><br>Clark's ears were starting to burn, and he was relieved to hear his mother stand up and stretch.

><br>"Clark, are you ready to go?"

><br>He turned his attention to her and smiled. "Air Force One, at your service."

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><br>Some time later, they were all relaxing in the living room. Dinner had been eaten, a cake produced, and birthday wishes duly sung. The birthday boy had then proceeded to eat most of the cake, to the amusement of his family.

><br>Jonathan was stretched out in his easy chair as if he never intended to leave it, within hand-holding distance of Martha, who was on the love seat. Clark was propped against one end of the sofa, with Lois leaning back against his chest. They all wore contented expressions, basking in the warmth of family and the absence of outsiders.

><br>"Oh, my, it's good to be back here," Martha sighed, running her fingers over the couch cushion. "I didn't know how much I loved it until I was away for so long. Thanks for bringing me here tonight, Clark, and thanks for that dinner..." It was only take out from Wichita, but the company had redeemed it.

><br>She looked fondly over at her only son, relaxing with his ever-so-slightly tipsy wife. Lois had indulged in more wine than was usual for her, enjoying their respite from public eye. "I love this house," she now declared enthusiastically. "Do you guys remember the first time I was here?"

><br>Oh yes, that first encounter with Kryptonite, and the first time someone had tried to kill them for their relationship to Clark - Martha didn't think she could ever forget it. It hadn't come up in conversation for years, though, not since they'd filled Lois in on everything she'd missed the first time around.

><br>Lois giggled. "I totally embarrassed myself, didn't I? Telling you what a fax machine was, when you had one already... and saying Jonathan was, was..." Words failed her as the giggles won out again.

><br>Martha smiled, and saw answering smiles on the Kent men. Lois had been so out of her element then, and so adorable. "You didn't do that all by yourself, you know, Lois. Clark set you up for a good deal of it."

><br>Lois looked confused as Clark protested, "Who, me?"

><br>"Yes, you." Martha answered in a tone of mock severity. "I quote: 'Careful, Mom, Lois thinks the cook might be a cross-dresser.' You could have told her yourself that she was talking about your father; how was she to know?"

><br>Lois looked up at her husband in dawning realization. "Yeah, she's right... Busted, Kent! And I thought you were so sweet and naive back then..."

><br>He laughed. "I \*was\*! But I was being steadily corrupted by this big-city girl who would have run me over like a steamroller if I wasn't careful." He gently tickled her stomach, and she swatted his hand away, unmollified.

><br>"Yeah, right, I'm so sure. I'll get you back, Clark, just see if I don't..." she threatened, although the effect was somewhat spoiled



by her huge grin.

><br>"Oh, you don't have to, Lois," Martha leaned forward to catch her daughter-in-law's eye. "Why do you think I asked if you two were sleeping together, when I knew perfectly well that you weren't?"

><br>"Mo-om!" Clark protested, covering his eyes in remembered embarrassment.

><br>Lois giggled. "You are evil, Martha; I can't believe the American people voted for you."

><br>"I can," Jonathan interjected dryly. "Considering how many crooks there are in office, I think it's perfectly obvious that the American people like that sort of thing."

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><br>Back at the White House, Keith's guard shift was up. "All quiet?" His replacement queried.

><br>"Nine o'clock and all's well," Keith confirmed. He was glad to be done sharing duty with Braun. Not that he was a bad guy, he just had no imagination.

><br>Braun frowned at this hint of frivolity. "All's quiet. Picasso and Scarecrow are in there alone, and they asked not to be disturbed if at all possible."

><br>"They have the TV on," Keith added helpfully. "I think this recent upsurge of domestic terrorism has really got them concerned." He knew it was none of his business; Secret Service agents were supposed to be objective and uninvolved. But from everything he'd seen so far, he really liked the Kents. They were so real, and down to earth.

><br>He felt somewhat connected to them, as well, knowing that they shared his interest in Superman; Keith always enjoyed meeting other fans. But their attitude felt different, somehow, even considering the fact that they knew the superhero. It felt almost as if they were hiding something. So far, however, his subconscious wasn't giving him much to work with other than a vague feeling that refused to leave him alone.

><br>Whatever he was picking up on, it was very subtle. So subtle that it was either something too small to bother with... or too big to be careless about. And Superman was right in the middle of it; he'd bet anything on that. Maybe tonight he'd be able to get a handle on it.

><br>\*\*\*

><br>"...so then I had to spend the rest of the day with the Prime Minister, and couldn't get back to the telecommunications bill until after dinner." Martha sighed, fidgeting on the love seat and reaching for Jonathan's hand. It was there, steady and comforting as always, as soon as she reached for it.

><br>"You overdo it, you know," he observed gruffly. Their after-dinner coffees had grown cold as they compared notes on their recent lives.

><br>"Well what did you expect me to do, Jonathan?" she snapped back at him, under more stress than she wanted to admit.

><br>He took her tone in stride as Lois and Clark rose silently to take dishes to the kitchen. "I expect you to take care of yourself first, Martha. That Prime Minister would have been fine without you, and you could have gotten some time to yourself."

><br>She shook her head irritably. "No, if I'd had time, I would have had to read the reports about those domestic terrorists."

><br>"Martha." Jonathan sat forward, demanding her attention. "You do not have to do everything yourself. You have a staff, you have the resources of the entire Federal Government. You've appointed people

you trust to do their jobs, so let them do them. How many times have we had to tell Clark this? You can't do everything yourself, no matter who you are."

><br>Martha looked at her husband, caught by the sincerity and worry in his eyes. She sighed again, surrendering to the inevitable. "Okay. You're right. I guess I really do need to pull back some. It's just that I care so much..."

><br>"I know," he soothed, patting the hand he still held. "And that's why they elected you. But you have to take care of yourself. This is only February, you know."

><br>"I know," she responded, starting to get her natural good humor back. "The \*first\* February, at that."

><br>\*\*\*

><br>In the farmhouse kitchen, Lois washed dishes while Clark dried. Her earlier buzz from the wine had worn off, leaving her tired, and not up to watching her husband's parents disagree. Intellectually, she knew that this wasn't a real fight, and that the Kents would be fine. Emotionally, however, some part of her was still a little girl, watching the two most important people in her world screaming hateful things at each other.

><br>"Hey, have you heard what my dad's new code name is?"

><br>Clark's tone was light; he must be trying to tease her out of her momentary depression. She smiled up at him, grateful for his presence and his understanding. "No, I haven't, Boy Scout; what are they calling him?"

><br>He grinned at her use of his code name. "They had a hard time settling on one, but apparently someone wanted to go with an Oz theme - he's Scarecrow."

><br>"Are you sure that's from Oz? None of the other names are. Probably a lucky thing, too. Just imagine what they'd call the rest of us. I just can't see myself as Dorothy, even if I have developed a fondness for Kansas." They exchanged smiles as Lois handed her husband a coffee cup to dry. "What would Superman be in an Oz theme, I wonder..." She peeked up at him, with a teasing glint in her eye. "Did the flying monkeys have names?"

><br>"Lo-is!"

><br>"Okay, okay, no Oz theme..." She considered it for a moment further, and then grinned as inspiration struck. "Maybe they were thinking of Scarecrow and Mrs. Kent."

><br>Clark looked puzzled.

><br>"Don't you remember that show? It was actually called Scarecrow and Mrs. King. I used to watch it in high school and college; it was fun. Amanda's mom always reminded me of my mom - only nicer."

><br>"Nope," Clark shook his head. "Don't think I ever watched it."

><br>"Well, it was fun to start with, but then they got married, and you know how life gets boring after a couple gets married," she teased, setting down the dishrag.

><br>His eyebrows climbed. "Marriage is supposed to be boring?"

><br>She nodded solemnly, her eyes dancing. "That's what the TV executives tell us."

><br>His face cleared, and he broke into a grin. "Oh, well, what do TV executives know? They've obviously never met you..."

><br>\*\*\*

><br>In a dimly lit D.C. apartment, Keith drummed his fingers on his desk. Things were not making sense, and he much preferred for things to make sense. The awareness of something odd had grown slowly, and

he couldn't say what had first triggered his curiosity. All he knew was, there was something strange going on, and it involved Superman. Tonight, as he'd been chatting on IRC, meeting new people and introducing them to old friends, a question had hit him: "How did Superman know my name?"

><br>That meeting, five weeks ago, had been the first time he'd ever met his hero, of that he was certain. At first he'd been stunned. Then, for weeks, he'd gloried in it in his own quiet way (despite his failure), taking great pride from the fact that Superman had called him by name. Tonight, however, for the first time, he'd seen past the excitement of the moment. How \*had\* Superman known his name?

><br>In that meeting, after Superman had greeted the others, he had quite clearly said, "Hello, Keith, pleased to meet you."

><br>He could think of a hundred ways for Superman to have learned his name, most of them at least vaguely plausible. He was used to interpolating Superman's thoughts from his actions; it was one of the main activities on the newsgroup. But nothing he could come up with satisfied him, and none of them explained the \*other\* things he'd noticed. They were subtle things, things like the tone of Lois's voice when she spoke to him, or the expression in the First Gentleman's eye when Superman was on the news.

><br>Keith stood, determined to resolve this, to prove himself wrong. First thing to do was research. He had hours of Superman on video, taped from the news or obtained through friends, some of which he hadn't looked at in a while. He'd re-watch them all tonight, paying close attention to Superman's interaction with any or all of the Kents.

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><br>After another hour, the party broke up; Madam President needed her sleep. Clark took off with her first, leaving his father and wife to wait for their turns. Jonathan watched his daughter-in-law pace restlessly. On the campaign trail, he and Lois had grown unexpectedly closer; she had often helped him to adjust to the relentless focus on his spouse, a situation very familiar to Superman's wife. They'd had plenty of time to talk while Martha planned her campaign and Clark saved the world.

><br>And Jonathan knew that Lois still craved a father's approval in her life. Sam Lane was still not around much, though his visits had increased since the election. Perry White was a credible substitute, and Jonathan was glad for Lois's sake that he'd been there, but he suspected it took something far out of the ordinary to shake those two out of their habitual, comfortable editor-reporter roles. Jonathan felt lucky that he could treat Lois like the daughter he'd never had, and she seemed to respond in kind.

><br>Tonight, he could see very clearly that something was bothering her. "How are things going, Lois? You seem troubled."

><br>After a moment's hesitation, she looked over at him with a strained smile. "It's nothing much..."

><br>Her voice trailed away, but he didn't interrupt, silently encouraging her to open up.

><br>"Well, it's just harder than I thought it would be to go back to work." She resumed pacing. "Everywhere we go, people assume we're representing Martha - and in a way, we are, I know that, anything we do could end up on the evening news. But I could deal with that."

><br>Jonathan nodded. Clark had told the story of their initial press conference over dinner, making light of their difficulties.

><br>"It's just that I'm not used to being the center of attention

everywhere," Lois admitted finally. "Everyone asks us questions about Martha, about foreign policy, and federal politics. Even \*Jimmy\* expects an inside scoop, and it's not even his beat! He ought to get away from politics altogether, actually," she added as a side note, her voice momentarily lightening from impassioned to impartial. "He's got a great understanding of technology, and he has a flair for writing about it so that other people can understand it, too; it's quite a talent. Anyway," she concluded, almost on a wail. "I'm used to being in charge - you know, I call the shots, I ask the questions - I don't like having it the other way around."

><br>Jonathan mulled over that tangled outburst, trying to discover the main point. "So you don't feel as if you're in control?"

><br>"Exactly!" She nodded vigorously. "Clark doesn't seem to mind as much; I guess he's used to the attention..."

><br>True, Jonathan thought privately, and he's also used to not being in control - he lost control of his life the moment he met you, young lady, and I'm not even sure you know it. But Lois was definitely used to being in charge of her life, and he could see how much this was upsetting her.

><br>He stood up, and walked over to where she was looking out the window, resting a hand on her shoulder. "I know it's a challenge, Lois." He paused, picking his words carefully. "This whole political thing has been a huge change for all of us, in ways we could never have expected. But you're a Kent, now, Lois, and we Kents are strong, flexible, tenacious." He could see the beginnings of a smile on her reflection in the window.

><br>His voice softened. "The biggest challenge I think Martha and I ever faced was when we learned we couldn't have children." He heard Lois's surprised intake of breath; it wasn't a subject they discussed much. "But did we give up? No, we went out and found us a baby in a spaceship, doggone it," he added, unable to resist the punch-line. Lois couldn't keep from giggling, and he chuckled along with her, glad to have lightened her mood.

><br>"Seriously, Lois... don't let this get you down. You just keep going about your business, and the vultures will forget about you soon enough." He rubbed her back in what he hoped was a supportive way, and was rewarded when she turned around to give him a hug.

><br>"Thanks, Jonathan," she whispered into his shoulder. "I get like this sometimes, but I'll get over it, I always do." She stepped back and wiped her eyes, which were just a little blurred with tears.

><br>A muffled thud on the porch alerted them that they'd missed Clark's arrival. "Everybody ready to go in here?"

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><br>After watching hours of video footage, Keith hadn't managed to talk himself out of his suspicions. He might even have proved himself right. Nothing on the tapes had been blatant. But every once in a while, he'd spotted things. Between Lois and Superman, on the tapes, he'd seen familiar gestures, a certain awareness -- exactly like what he'd recently seen, in person, between Lois and Clark.

><br>Ever since the Internet Superman groups had began, the idea of a secret identity for the hero had been a recurring one; very popular with the newbies especially. They were all dissuaded from the notion by Keith and a few other 'old-timers' on the newsgroup. It seemed patently absurd that anyone so powerful as Superman would want to live as a normal person. He wasn't human; he couldn't want the same things as everyone else. The idea of a lofty, lonely demi-god held powerful appeal. For the small-minded, it helped to even the score;

for romantics, it made him irresistible - perfect and unattainable. "...there are things I'll never have," he'd admitted once, in court, while looking longingly at Lois Lane, which seemed to settle the debate before it had gotten properly started.

><br>Now, however, the certainty was melting away as all the evidence pointed to a new conclusion. A conclusion that fit all the facts, and explained much. Keith knew that when a hypothesis didn't fit the evidence, you discarded the hypothesis, not the facts. Still, he found himself resisting the new hypothesis. He was used to a certain image of his hero - of the self-sacrificing icon who continually gave, and never seemed to take. It was hard to reconcile that to the unassuming family man that Keith had only just begun to know.

><br>But... no wonder Superman had known his name, no wonder the Kents looked at him with such love in their eyes. Superman must be... Clark Kent.

><br>Keith shook his head in wonder. All these years, that's where he'd been hiding... Keith was abruptly stunned by how close he'd been to his hero without realizing it. "Wow. I was talking to him." A thought struck him, and he grinned, somewhat wildly. "No wonder they didn't want Secret Service protection..."

><br>This would take some time to adjust to.

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><br>"So what were you doing to make my wife cry?" Clark asked his father as they flew through the night air, leaving Kansas beneath them.

><br>Jonathan sighed, holding tight to his son's neck. After all these years of flying, you'd think he'd be used to it. "She's having a tough time getting back into her normal routine."

><br>Clark was silent for a moment. "Yeah, I know. It's hard on her. Maybe we shouldn't have tried to return to the paper so soon."

><br>"She'll be fine, son. She's a fighter." Jonathan smiled in the darkness. "Just like your mother."

><br>Clark grinned, glancing sideways for a moment. "You can say that again." His grin faded as he turned forward once more. "I'm a little worried about Mom, though."

><br>"Yes, so am I. She never seems to relax anymore. I never thought I'd see the day when I'd miss her painting and artwork, but... at least it used to help her unwind."

><br>They flew in silence for a few more moments, watching the countryside blossom with more streetlights and neon signs as they moved eastward.

><br>"Well," Clark offered diffidently, as they began their approach to Washington, "I couldn't help noticing there's a little walkway on the roof of the White House. It connects to a solarium, which can't really be seen from the ground. Maybe she could set that up as a studio?"

><br>"I'll look into it, boy. Good idea."

><br>Clark arrived at the window and tapped in the passcode with ease. "Thanks, Dad. Goodnight." He set his father inside the room, waved to his mother, and took off back towards Kansas and his waiting wife.

><br>"Martha?" Jonathan made his way to the love seat to recover. "Clark had an interesting idea..."

><br>--- Chapter 2 - Public party, two weeks later (March 14th), Metropolis ---

><br>Every year (Keith had been told), the U.S. Press Association picked outstanding journalists to receive the Merriweather Awards, the prestigious Kerth Awards, and more rarely, the pinnacle of them

all, the Kornegay Prize for Outstanding Contributions to the Journalistic Profession. This year, they had chosen to honor Perry White with the Kornegay Prize, and the award banquet was packed.

><br>Everyone who was anyone in the news business had coveted an invitation. And at the last minute, President Kent herself had decided to attend, to thank Perry for his editorial support for her campaign. Secret Service agents, including Keith Jackson, had scrambled to provide security. They'd only had time for a cursory sweep of the Metropolis Hilton before the President had arrived, but they knew it well; she'd had her election night party in this hotel.

><br>Keith took his assigned place covering a side door into the ballroom, and studied the crowd. He did note with some relief that Clark Kent was there, sitting near the front, next to a younger man whom Keith thought he recognized as Jim Olsen.

><br>As he continued to scan the crowd, a detached portion of his brain wondered if Olsen knew he was sitting with Superman. In the past two weeks, he'd often wondered how many people were in on this secret. When he wasn't trying to convince himself that he'd imagined the whole thing, that is. He had been wrong before, sometimes embarrassingly so. And even if he was right, he didn't know what to do about it. He wanted to tell Superman his conclusions, and to pledge whatever help he could give, but no opportunities had presented themselves, and he was hesitant to intrude.

><br>It had also taken him some time to come to grips with the idea of Superman having a family. It upset much of what Keith had thought he'd known, and yet... it made him seem less distant, more approachable. More vulnerable. He had more to lose than most people ever suspected, and yet he still risked it all, every day. Perhaps he was even more heroic than anyone realized.

><br>There was clearly quite a lot about the superhero that very few people knew, that most people should never know. This secret carried a huge responsibility.

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><br>Clark's enjoyment of the awards banquet was marred only by his wife's absence. She was immensely proud of Perry, and had originally planned to attend, but at the last minute, she'd come down with some sort of minor illness. She wouldn't hear of him missing the event, however, so he'd given her ticket to Jimmy -- and asked for a Secret Service agent to watch their townhouse for the evening. He was beginning to appreciate having some official help in protecting his loved ones. It comforted him to know that his parents would be guarded by the United States government for the rest of their lives, no matter what happened to him.

><br>The master of ceremonies rose from the head table and stood behind the podium. "Madam President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press, and Distinguished Guests, thank you for coming to join us tonight. We're here to honor some of the best in our field..."

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><br>Keith paid little attention to the speeches, listening instead to the terse reports of his fellow agents in his earphone. They tracked guests entering and leaving, movement on the streets outside, and the occasional message from headquarters back in DC. All was quiet until they received the bomb threat.

><br>"Attention all agents," his earphone crackled. "There is a possibility of a bomb in this room." Braun was the highest ranking agent present, and he took charge smoothly, explaining in few words that there had been a threat made against the journalists at the

award banquet. Immediately, the two agents nearest Picasso and Scarecrow moved forward, shepherding the couple out of the room. They'd be headed for a car at the rear of the hotel, and should get away cleanly.

><br>The banquet attendees were starting to make a fuss when Braun stepped up to the microphone. "Ladies and Gentlemen, please don't be alarmed. There is a situation, but it is under control. Madam President is needed elsewhere, and we need you to remove yourselves to the hotel lobby."

><br>The noise level in the room quadrupled following this statement, as the guests either demanded answers (they were journalists, after all) or streamed towards the rear doors, speculating wildly. Keith opened the side doors and directed a portion of the crowd to that exit, steadfastly refusing to answer questions. If word of the bomb got out, panic would likely ensue, causing a rush for the exits that might itself injure many people.

><br>He turned from the second batch of people to see that most of the rest of the crowd was attempting to reach the rear doors. He started toward them, to re-direct them to the side, when he was stopped by a hand on his arm. He looked over to see Clark's concerned face.

><br>"What is it?"

><br>Keith had already refused to answer this question multiple times, but now he instinctively gave the truth. "There's been a bomb threat." He kept his voice low, and gave as much information as he had, as quickly as he could. "It's aimed at this banquet; someone's got a vendetta against the press in general. We don't know if there's really a bomb or where it might be."

><br>Clark looked around quickly. Searching for an exit? Keith gave as much of a hint as he dared. "Take the side door, it's less crowded."

><br>In seconds, he was gone, and seconds after that, Superman flew in from the opposite side of the ballroom, landing near Agent Braun and having a quick conversation. Then he turned and began squinting around the room.

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><br>Clark scanned the room, his heart pounding. His parents should be safe, but there were still too many people in this room. In moments, he located the bomb, concealed within an air vent in the south wall.

><br>He sped to the vent and removed the cover, inspecting the bomb. It was about as large as a briefcase, carrying enough explosives to kill everyone at the awards ceremony. His first instinct was to fly it out of the building, but it looked unstable enough to detonate if he moved it. And then he noticed a timer, which was steadily ticking down to zero. With little time to explore his options, Clark grabbed the bomb and hugged it to him, wrapping his arms and legs around it, lying facing the wall. It exploded almost immediately after he secured it.

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><br>The explosion sounded terrible and terrifying, but when the dust began to clear, Keith could see that it had done surprisingly little damage, most of it to the south wall. Superman was getting up from the floor, the front of his uniform covered in soot. A surprising amount of it came off when he brushed at it, but his cape was definitely tattered around the edges. It was exactly what Keith would have expected, but it amazed him to see it nonetheless.

><br>A wail at the back of the room drew his attention. The force of the bomb, even muffled, had been enough to knock down a chandelier, hurting three people. Superman rushed over to them, obviously

concerned at their condition.

><br>"They're going to be all right," Superman announced, after staring at them intently, "but they need to get to a hospital. I'll fly them there, one at a time."

><br>He gathered up the first victim, an older woman, and took off. As soon as he left, Braun took charge once more, speaking into his throat mike. "Seal up the doors, and get me a head count in the lobby. I don't want to lose anyone."

><br>The next few minutes were a blur to Keith. There were people everywhere, it seemed, as the hotel's personnel tried to tally the damage and discover who was injured, and reporters started coming back in from the lobby, searching for clues and trying to interview everyone in sight. Superman flew back into the room just as the paramedics arrived, and he seemed to be waiting in case they needed his services.

><br>Braun, meanwhile, had obtained a copy of the guest list and was checking it against the names collected from those still in the lobby. "Colleen Kane!" he shouted over the general din, and was rewarded by an impatiently waving hand attached to a short blonde woman, part of the crowd around the remnants of the bomb. A check mark went down on the sheet. "Clark Kent!"

><br>Time seemed to slow to a crawl.

><br>Keith's gaze snapped over to Superman as everything else faded into the periphery of his attention. Superman had looked up at the name, and his expression was one of suppressed panic. He glanced around the room, in exactly the same manner Keith had seen Clark look for an exit, not ten minutes earlier. All Keith's doubts fled. Superman wasn't worried about a friend, he was worried about his cover.

><br>"Anybody know where Clark Kent is?" Braun demanded once more.

><br>Without making a conscious choice, Keith answered. "He's okay, he's just out in the hall. He told me he needed a little peace to recover."

><br>He could almost feel Superman... Clark... looking at him, but he kept his attention on Special Agent Braun, who was scowling.

><br>"Well why didn't you say so the first time? Anyway, go check on him again, we don't want to lose him while Superman's busy in here."

><br>Keith nodded, and made his way to the side doors. He only hoped he could pull this off long enough for Clark to finish with the paramedics. He opened one of the double doors and looked out... no one. That was good; no one would be able to contradict him. After pausing for a moment, he turned back to the ballroom, closing the door once more. Braun was no longer paying him any attention.

><br>Superman, however, was still staring at him, a puzzled expression in his eyes. //Do you know what you're doing?// he seemed to ask.

><br>Keith put on his best honest expression and nodded slightly. Aloud, all he said was, "It's all right, Superman. Clark is fine."

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><br>Clark barely heard what the paramedics were saying. His mind was whirling as he tried to figure out what had just happened. Had Keith actually been covering for him? On purpose? The man had just checked an empty hallway (feeling oddly schizoid for a moment, Clark had checked it himself, just to make sure). So either the agent was seriously delusional... or, somehow, he knew the truth.



><br>He needed to find out more about this, but at the moment, the head paramedic was waving for attention, and Clark snapped himself back into focus. "Yes, what do you need?"

><br>"This gentleman needs to be taken to Mercy General as fast as possible; we've stabilized him for now, but he should be getting more comprehensive treatment. We'll call ahead and alert them that you're coming."

><br>Clark nodded and carefully picked the man up, getting him settled for the short trip.

><br>"Boy, was he distracted, or what?" one of the paramedics observed softly to her partner. "All worried about his friend Clark, I guess."

><br>The other medic laughed. "Nah, he just knows that if Clark buys it, then he's got another shot at Lois Lane Kent..."

><br>Clark frowned to himself, wondering if he had time to turn around and say something in his defense.

><br>"Superman's not like that, you idiot!" the first paramedic replied, clearly disgusted at the comment. "You can be such a jerk sometimes..."

><br>Satisfied, Clark let their argument fade away behind him as he made his way to the hospital.

><br>--- Epilogue ---

><br>After delivering his patient, Clark flew back into the hotel, changed in the third floor cleaning supply closet, and made his way down to the hallway in which he was supposed to be resting.

><br>He had no idea what to expect. If he were on the verge of exposure, well, there had been worse moments for it. He thought he'd built up quite a lot of goodwill over the years, and he did have some influence over the current President... He realized he was procrastinating. Adjusting his glasses nervously, he opened the ballroom door and entered, looking around for Keith.

><br>The agent was sitting at one of the banquet tables, facing the remnants of the clean up crew. At the sound of the door opening, however, he turned, and jumped to his feet. They just looked at one another for a moment, measuring each other. Keith broke the silence. "You, ah, all recovered?"

><br>Well, the cape's ruined, Clark had a strong urge to say, but other than that I'm fine. He repressed the dangerous humor. "Yeah. The hallway was very peaceful."

><br>"I'll bet it was," Keith agreed cordially. "It sure looked quiet when I checked. Look, can I buy you a drink somewhere?"

><br>Clark looked surprised. "Are you off-duty, then?"

><br>Keith shook his head. "I've been assigned to protect you for the rest of the evening, under the assumption that Superman's busy." His smile seemed to invite Clark to appreciate the irony of the situation.

><br>Clark smiled back, reluctantly amused. "That suits. Let's go then. I think we need to talk."

><br>They walked a few blocks before they found a suitably dim and noisy bar. It might be a trifle difficult to hear each other, but certainly no one else could hear them. They settled into a booth and ordered a pitcher of "lite" beer.

><br>Clark studied the Secret Service agent, a man who apparently now had the power to completely destroy Clark's life. He was ashamed to realize he didn't know that much about Keith, other than that they shared an interest in football. He wanted to ask how he'd given himself away, but then again, if Keith didn't really know anything, or still had his doubts... He wished Lois were there; she was much better at this sort of thing.

><br>Keith met his gaze unflinchingly. "I started wondering a few

weeks ago," he volunteered. "After Superman knew my name. That just didn't fit... and I started seeing lots of other little things that didn't fit." He paused, looking around the bar as the waitress brought their pitcher and two full glasses to the table.

><br>After taking a sip, he continued speaking. "You know, when I was growing up, I wanted to be a sports star. I was too short for basketball, so I picked football. I got real good at it in high school, and in college. I was on track to be drafted by the pros, or so they said, and you probably can't even imagine how much I wanted that. All the fame, all the money, all the women..." He paused, as Clark watched, wondering where this could possibly be going.

><br>Keith stared into his glass. "And then, in my sophomore year... there was this guy. This guy who could lift a rocket into \*orbit\* all by himself..." He glanced up then, and as Clark met his eyes, he could see the glint of enthusiasm and hero-worship that always humbled him. Keith glanced away again. "I mean, it seemed like this guy could do \*anything\*, have anything he wanted. But all he wanted to do... was help people, to make the world a better place. It made me feel pretty selfish by comparison."

><br>"Superman wasn't as selfless as all that," Clark felt obliged to point out. "In some ways, he's just like anybody else."

><br>Keith nodded, meeting Clark's eyes once more. "I can see that now... but you know, it doesn't make that much difference. He could have had anything he asked for, but he never asked for anything." Though Keith continued to use the third person pronoun when discussing Superman, it was clear to Clark that the agent knew to whom he was speaking.

><br>"So," Keith continued, in a slightly more positive tone, "I started looking into how I could make the world a better place. And I ended up looking at law enforcement, and from there I wanted to try for the Secret Service. I mean, I was still ambitious." He grinned then, the first relaxed expression he'd worn in hours. "I'm rambling, aren't I? Sorry, it's just that I'm still a little bit shook up. I mean, even though I \*knew\* earlier, I didn't really \*know\* until about an hour ago, and it's a lot to adjust to, you know?"

><br>Clark smiled sympathetically. "I know. But you'll get used to knowing, and I'll get used to knowing you know..."

><br>"And then what?" Keith looked serious again; Clark was beginning to realize that it was his natural state.

><br>"Who knows?" He shrugged his shoulders. "We'll work it out as we go along. That's the way I've always done things." He grinned suddenly, pleased with how this was turning out. He'd had many nightmares about being discovered. "You're taking it really well so far, though. Remind me someday to tell you about how Lois reacted..."

><br>The End

><br>[note: The U.S. Press Association was created by Chris Mulder, who created it for her excellent "Meet Me In Kansas City"; she very kindly let me borrow it. And the Kornegay Prize is named after a colleague of mine - when I caught part of Tempus Fugitive, and desperately needed to see the rest, Chad Kornegay let me borrow his tape. Without him I might not be here today. Is it just coincidence that his initials are CK? You decide g]

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End

file.